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ABSTRACT

Life is changing for the American Indians of South Dakota and the United States. Nationally, the population is young, growing, and becoming more urban. The South Dakota population exhibits these same traits, except that it remains predominantly rural. In South Dakota, American Indians combat poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and inadequate health care. Poor housing and nutrition, lack of career opportunities, and few job opportunities compound their problems. The South Dakota American Indian population is in transition: socially, economically, demographically, and culturally. Though improvements have been made in educational attainment, high dropout rates from school still exist. Low median income and high unemployment and underemployment persist; many Indians are employed in the lower paying sectors. High rates of poverty are a critical problem. This bulletin assesses the socioeconomic characteristics of South Dakota's American Indian population during this transitional period. Comparisons are made with nationwide American Indian statistics collected in 1970 and 1980. The socioeconomic characteristics examined in this study include population, family composition, marital status, poverty status, education, income, and several labor force characteristics. Tables are used to depict statistical comparisons. (ALL)

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American Indians in South Dakota: A Profile

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POPULATION UPDATE

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American Indians in South Dakota: A Profile

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Life is changing for the American Indians of South Dakota and the United States.*

Nationally, the population is young, growing, and becoming more urban. The South Dakota population exhibits these same trends except that it remains predominantly rural.

The number of American Indians in the U.S. grew from half a million in 1960 to 760,000 in 1970 and to 1,420,400 in 1980. The percentage living in rural areas declined from over 70% in 1960 to 55% in 1970 and 48% in 1980 (Johnson, 1975; U.S. Census Bureau, 1980).

In South Dakota, in contrast, over 60% of American Indians lived on reservations in 1980. Populations of the nine reservations in the state (Fig 1) are shown in Table 1.

In South Dakota, American Indians must combat poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and inadequate health care. Poor housing and nutrition, lack of career opportunities, and few job opportunities compound their problems.

This bulletin assesses the socio-economic characteristics of South Dakota's American Indian population during this transitional period. Comparisons are made with nationwide American Indian statistics: the focus is the period between 1970 and 1980.

*The term American Indian is designated by the U.S. Census Bureau and will be used in this bulletin. However, some people prefer the term Native American.

Table 1. American Indian population on identified reservations in South Dakota, 1980.

South Dakota reservations	*Counties*	*All races*	*American Indian*	*% American Indian*
South Dakota	All	690,678	44,948	6.5
All reservations	—	48,716	28,468	58.4
Cheyenne River Reservation	Total	1826	1529	83.7
	Dewey	908	751	82.7
	Ziebach	918	778	84.7
Crow Creek Reservation	Total	1787	1474	82.5
	Buffalo	1439	1256	87.3
	Hughes	205	153	74.6
	Hyde	143	65	45.5
Flandreau Reservation	Moody	169	158	93.5
Lower Brule Reservation	Total	1023	850	83.1
	Lyman	1007	843	83.7
	Stanley	16	7	43.8
Pine Ridge Reservation	Total	13229	11946	90.3
	Jackson	1906	1372	72.0
	Shannon	11323	10574	93.4
Rosebud Reservation	Todd	7328	5688	77.6
Sisseton Reservation	Total	11617	2676	23.0
	Codington	237	2	.8
	Day	745	312	41.9
	Grant	316	—	—
	Marshall	1305	263	20.2
	Roberts	9014	2099	23.3
Standing Rock Reservation	Corson	5196	2459	47.3
Yankton Reservation	Charles Mix	6541	1688	25.8

Fig 1. American Indian reservations in South Dakota.

*extends into North Dakota

The socio-economic characteristics examined in this study include population, family composition, marital status, poverty status, education, income, and several labor force characteristics.

Who is an Indian?

There are at least as many definitions of who is an Indian as there are federal agencies whose constituencies include Indians.

Bureau of the Census definition

The population enumeration by the Bureau of the Census is considered one of the most reliable definitions, although various tribes and federal, state, and local agencies continue to disagree over the total counts. A major problem is that federal agencies and individual tribes use different definitions of "Indian."

In 1980, for the first time, the Bureau of the Census relied on self-identification, which allowed individuals themselves to choose the racial group with which they most identified. In the 1970 census, race had been determined on the basis of observation by enumerators.

Bureau of Indian Affairs definition

To be designated as an Indian eligible for basic Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) services, an individual must meet certain criteria.

First, he or she must live on or near a reservation or on or near trust or restricted land under jurisdiction of the BIA. Second, he or she must be a member of a tribe, band, or group of Indians recognized by the federal government. For some purposes a third criterion, blood quantum, is included; that is, the person must be of one fourth or more Indian descent (USDI, BIA, 1986).

Population

In 1980, South Dakota ranked third in the nation in proportion of American Indians in its total population. Over 6% of the state's population was American Indian; less than 1% of the national population was American Indian.

In 1960 the American Indian population in South Dakota was at 25,794, up 10.5% from 1950. The population grew to 32,365 in 1970, or 25.5% over the 1960 figure. By 1980 the population was 44,948, up 38.9% in 10 years.

While these increases were primarily due to higher birth and lower death rates, increased identification as American Indians and better data collection were partly responsible.

Currently, almost 44% of the South Dakota American Indian population is under the age of 16. Relatively high birth rates are specifically responsible for this younger median age in South Dakota. While the birth rate is especially high among rural and reservation American Indians nationally, it is also significantly higher for all American Indians, rural and urban, than for the total U.S. population.

The number of children born to women who had essentially completed their childbearing years was 4.6 in the American Indian population and 3.1 for all U.S. women in 1970 (Johnson, 1975). In 1980, the rate had declined for both populations to 2.9 for American Indians and 1.8 for the U.S. population.

Nationally, the median age of American Indians was 20.4 years in 1970 and 22.9 in 1980. The U.S. median age was 28.1 in 1970 and 30.0 in 1980. In rural areas 60% of American Indians were under 25 in 1960 and 1970; in 1980 this figure stood at 56%. In contrast, 46% of the U.S. population in rural areas was under 25 in 1970, dropping to 42% in 1980 (Johnson, 1975).

Currently, the life expectancy for American Indians is 10 years less than for the white population. The American Indian population of South Dakota is younger than the population of the state as a whole. In 1970, the median age for American Indians was 16.8 years, compared with 27.4 years for the state population as a whole. The 1980 figures were 18.3 years and 28.9 years, respectively.

In 1980 53.6% of the American Indians in South Dakota were 19 or younger, while, for the state, this group comprised less than 34% of the population. At the other end of the age scale, more than 17% of the state population was 60 or older in 1980. For the American Indian group this figure was 6.9%. (See Figs 2 and 3, where population pyramids reflect the age and sex composition of the American Indian population over time.)

Table 2. Composition of American Indian families, 1970-1980.

Characteristics	*Area*			
	United States		*South Dakota*	
Family type	*1980*	*1970*	*1980*	*1970*
Total number of families	341,401	149,122	8,167	5,167
% with own children under 18 years	66.0	65.8	73.5	67.7
% married-couple families	71.8	76.9	54.5	64.4
% female householder, no husband present	22.7	18.4	38.1	30.0
Persons per family	3.83	—	4.67	—
% of children under 18 years living with both parents	62.9	68.6	47.4	58.8

These age differences have implications for the future. While one group will concentrate its resources on schools and other services needed by a younger population, the other will be more concerned with servicing an increasingly older population.

Family composition

Between 1970 and 1980, the composition of American Indian families changed. For American Indians in the United States, the percent of married-couple families decreased from 76.9% to 71.8%, and the percent of female-headed families increased from 18.4% to 22.7%.

This trend was also evident in South Dakota during the same time period. Of the 5,178 American Indian families in South Dakota in 1970, 30% were headed by females and 64.4% were married-couple families. In 1980, there were 8,167 American Indian families in the state, 38.1% headed by women and 54.5% consisting of married-couple families (Table 2).

Marital status

In the period 1970-1980, American Indians in the United States and South Dakota showed similar trends in marital status. In 1970, 57.9% of the male American Indians in the United States and 57.7% of the females were married; in 1980, these figures decreased to 49.6% and 48.0%, respectively.

In the same decade, the percentage of married American Indian males in South Dakota decreased from 49.1% to 37.3%, while the percentage of married females moved from 48.8% to 48.1%.

Divorce rates increased in the 1970 to 1980 period at both state and national levels. In 1980, 32% of all U.S. American Indians had been divorced at some point in their lives; in South Dakota 33% had been divorced.

Among American Indians in South Dakota in 1970, 4.9% of males and 8.5% of females had been or were currently divorced. By 1980 the divorce rate had increased to 8.6% for males and 12.2% for females (Table 3).

Poverty status

Poverty among American Indians in the United States and in South Dakota has been and continues to be a persistent problem (Table 4).

The American Indian population in South Dakota remains one of the most

economically depressed populations in the country. Four South Dakota counties (Ziebach, Shannon, Buffalo, and Corson) rank as the poorest in the nation with the lowest per capita income in the country. Incomes range from $2,783 per person in Ziebach to $3,436 per person in Corson County.

Nationally, more Sioux Indians are living in poverty (43.5%) than any other group of American Indians in the nation. The current official poverty level is $10,609 a year for a rural family of four (Argus Leader, October 6, 1985).

Given this definition, 45% of all American Indian families in South Dakota are below that threshold, compared to 12% of all white South Dakota families.

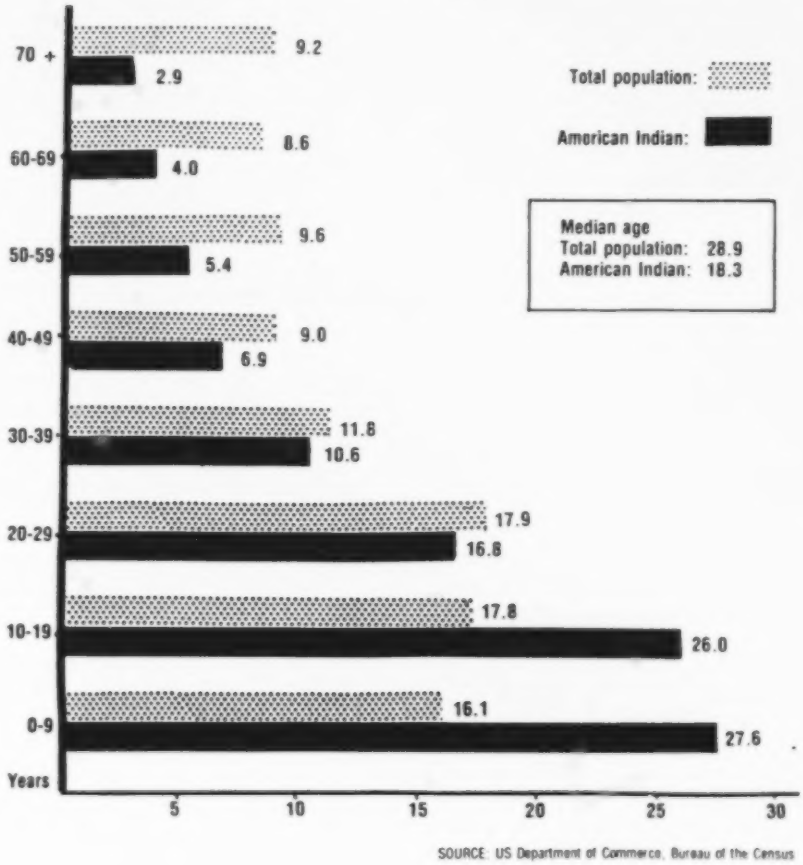
Unemployment remains significantly high among American Indians in South Dakota, which has relatively low unemployment rates as a whole. Both the percentages of American Indian families with incomes below the poverty level and of persons living below the poverty level declined in the period between 1969 and 1979. However, these numbers were still substantially higher than the percentages for all families and all persons during the same time period.

In 1979, 13.2% of South Dakota families were classified as living in poverty, compared to 23.7% and 45.8% for American Indian families in the United States and South Dakota, respectively. Of American Indian families living below the poverty level in South Dakota in 1979, 53.9% were headed by women.

A low income alone is not the only contributing factor to poverty. Others are limited job opportunities, relatively poor education, and employment in unskilled occupations which have allowed American Indians little opportunity for rising above the poverty level.

In addition, racial discrimination also contributes to widespread poverty among the American Indian people (Johnson, 1975).

Fig 2. Age classes of total and American Indian populations in South Dakota, 1980.



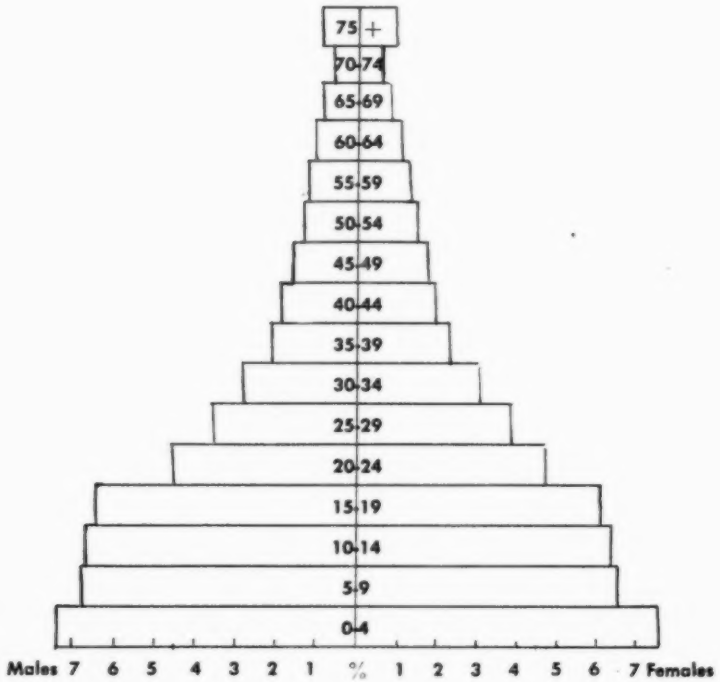
SOURCE: US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census

Table 3. Marital status of American Indians, 1970 and 1980 (by sex).

Characteristics	*Area*							
	United States				*South Dakota*			
	Male		*Female*		*Male*		*Female*	
	1980	*1970*	*1980*	*1970*	*1980*	*1970*	*1980*	*1970*
Total No.	473,255	219,672	495,231	233,266	12,813	7,704	13,783	8,580
% single	37.3	31.6	29.1	22.2	47.0	37.3	36.2	27.2
% married	49.6	57.9	48.0	57.7	37.9	49.1	38.1	48.8
% separated	2.9	2.4	4.1	4.0	2.5	2.8	3.4	4.7
% widowed	2.5	3.9	8.9	10.5	4.0	5.9	10.1	10.8
% divorced	7.6	4.1	10.1	5.6	8.6	4.9	12.2	8.5

Fig 3. American Indian population by sex, 1970 and 1980.

1970



1980

Income

Median income for American Indian families showed substantial gains during the 1969-1979 period on both the national and state levels (Fig 4).

The median income for all American Indian families in the United States was $13,724 in 1979, compared with $5,832 in 1969. For South Dakota, the median income for all American Indian families was $3,795 in 1969 and $9,141 in 1979.

The median income for American Indian families headed by women also increased for the United States and South Dakota over the same time period. However, there appears to be a widening gap between female-headed households and the married-couple category in terms of median incomes received by these two groups. The $580 difference in median incomes for these two categories of American Indian families in South Dakota in 1969 became a difference of over $3,000 in 1979.

Educational characteristics

There was an improvement in educational attainment over the period from 1970 to 1980 for American Indians in the United States and in South Dakota as well.

In 1970, 33.3% of American Indians in the U.S. aged 25 or over were high school graduates. In South Dakota, 26.7% of the American Indians in this same age category had graduated from high school. By 1980, these percentages had increased to 55.5% for the American Indians in the U.S. and 47.9% for those in South Dakota (Table 5).

The gap between the races in median years of school completed has narrowed considerably.

In 1970, the median years of school completed for the total South Dakota population was 12.1, while for American Indians of South Dakota it was 9.4. By 1980, however, the numbers

were 12.5 years and 11.7 years, respectively. What had been an almost 3-year difference has become a difference of less than one year.

If one believes that a high school diploma represents the minimum educational level needed to function in modern society, then the increase in the percentage of American Indians in South Dakota who have graduated from high school suggests a brighter employment picture for them in the future.

More American Indians are also attending and graduating from college. The percentage of American Indians in South Dakota with 4 or more years of college was 5.1% in 1980, compared with 1.9% in 1970.

Labor force characteristics

The picture presented by the 1970 and 1980 labor force status data is not as bright as it is for educational attainment among the American Indian people.

Table 4. Poverty status of American Indian families and persons, 1979.

Characteristics	*Area*			
	United States		*South Dakota*	
All income levels	*1979*	*1969*	*1979*	*1969*
Total number of families	341,401	149,122	8,167	5,167
Female householder, no husband present	77,401	27,465	3,118	1,552
% of families	22.7	18.4	38.1	30.0
Income in 1979 below poverty level				
Families below poverty	81,078	49,669	3,744	2,839
% below poverty	23.7	33.3	45.8	54.8
Female householder, no husband present	35,889	15,287	2,019	999
% of families	44.3	30.8	53.9	35.2
Persons living in poverty	408,067	280,427	20,819	16,268
% below poverty	27.5	38.3	47.5	55.6

Table 5. Educational characteristics of American Indians, 1980 (persons 16 years and older).

Characteristics	*Area*			
	United States		*South Dakota*	
Years of school completed	*1980*	*1970*	*1980*	*1970*
Persons 25 years and over	715,458	322,652	17,027	11,165
% less than 5 years of elementary school	8.4	15.5	4.1	6.2
% high school graduates	55.5	33.3	47.9	26.7
% 4 or more years of college	7.7	3.8	5.1	1.9
Median years of school completed	12.2	9.8	11.7	9.4

Unemployment

There was an increase in American Indian unemployment on the national level from 1970 to 1980. On the state level, the percentage of unemployed American Indians aged 16 and older changed very little over this same time period.

As Table 6 shows, the 1980 unemployment rate among American Indians in South Dakota was 20.3%, compared with 13.0% for American Indians in the U.S. The overall rate (all races) in South Dakota was 4.9% in 1980.

Considering all races in the state, overall unemployment rates for males and females are quite similar: 5.1% for men and 4.6% for women. For nonwhites, however, (Census Bureau statistics indicate that most persons in the nonwhite category in South Dakota are American Indian) the unemployment rates were substantially lower for females: 23.4% for males and 16.6% for females.

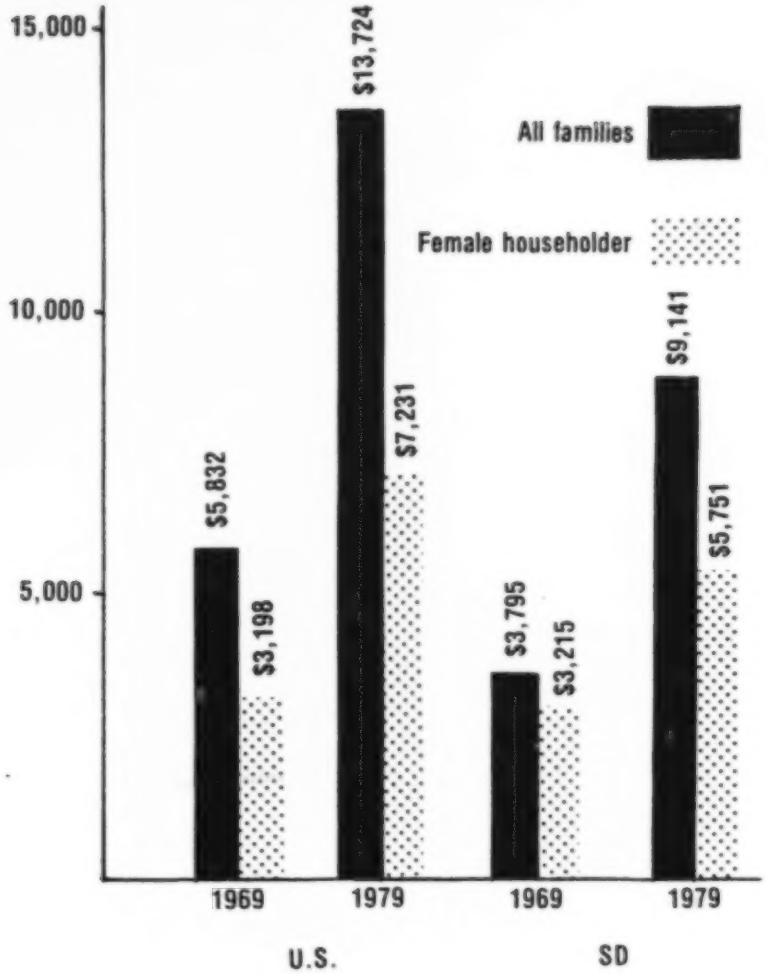
The unemployment rate for nonwhite males was expected to be over 40% during the mid-1980s and 17% for nonwhite females. Unemployment is particularly high among the nonwhite males in their 20s and 30s.

Combining labor force participation and unemployment rates, only about 35% of the nonwhite males and females are actually employed in the state (Dobbs, 1984, 9-10).

A report entitled "Native American unemployment: Confronting a distressing reality" and released in 1985 places the unemployment rate of South Dakota American Indians at 64%, the second highest of any state in the nation. Only Wyoming exceeded South Dakota with 65%. The difference between American Indian and overall state unemployment rates, which for South Dakota was 5.9% in 1985, was the largest in the nation.

Pine Ridge, the second largest reservation in the country, led with 87% unemployment, up

Fig 4. Median income, American Indian families, 1969 and 1979.



from 80% the previous year. The Lower Brule reservation reported the lowest rate at 50% (Lakota Times, June 11, 1986.)

Employment: Class of worker

In 1980, 66.2% of the employed American Indians in the U.S. aged 16 and older worked in the private sector; 28.5% were employed by federal, state, and local governmental units; and 4.8% were self employed.

At the state level, there was a shift from private to public sector employment for South Dakota American Indians between 1970 and 1980. In 1970, 48.0% were employed as private wage and salary workers and 43.8% were government workers. By 1980, the percent employed by the governmental sector was 64.4; the private wage and salary workers accounted for 29.5%; and 7.8% were self-employed.

Occupations

The percentage of American Indians 16 and older who were employed in "Managerial and Professional" occupations (as classified by the Bureau of the Census) increased over the 1970 to 1980 period for both the U.S. and South Dakota. The "Technical Sales Administrative Support" category exhibited the largest change over the period. In 1970, 16.2% of the American Indians in the U.S. and 15.4% of those in South Dakota were employed in these occupations. By 1980, the figures were 24.2% and 24.8%, respectively.

There were slight decreases in the percent employed in "Service" occupations at both the state and national levels from 1970 to 1980. In South Dakota, the percent of American Indians employed in "Farming Forestry Fishing" went from 15.2% in 1970 to 7.7% in 1980 (Table 7).

Summary

- In general, the population of American Indians in South Dakota is young, with over half living on the nine reservations and in Indian communities in the state.
- The population has increased by 28% from 1970 to 1980.
- Female-headed households increased, with 38% of families headed by women in 1980.
- There is extensive poverty among American Indians in South Dakota, with 45% living below the poverty level.
- Approximately 48% of the population had graduated from high school in 1980; almost double the percentage in 1970 (27%).
- There were substantial gains in median income, from $3,795 in 1969 to $9,141 in 1979.
- Unemployment is extremely high, at 20% while some reservations report 60 to 80% unemployment rates.
- Combined labor force participation rates and unemployment rates show approximately 35% of the nonwhite population of the state actually employed.
- Most employment was in federal government jobs.
- In 1980, the highest occupational categories for

Table 6 Labor force characteristics of American Indians (persons 16 years and older).

Characteristics	Area			
	United States		South Dakota	
Labor force status	1980	1970	1980	1970
Persons 16 years and over	985,937	452,938	25,608	16,284
Labor force	580,380	221,733	12,824	6,885
% of 16 years and over	58.9	48.9	50.1	42.3
Employed civilian labor force	492,988	190,233	10,179	5,425
Unemployed	73,788	23,664	2,600	1,420
% unemployed	13.0	11.1	20.3	20.7
Not in labor force	405,557	231,205	12,784	9,399
% not in labor force	41.1	51.0	49.9	57.7

Table 7. Occupation of employed American Indians, 1980 (persons 16 years and older).

Characteristics	Area			
	United States		South Dakota	
Employed persons	1980	1970	1980	1970
Persons 16 years and over	507,614	190,233	10,198	5,425
Managerial and professional	16.1	14.0	18.6	16.5
Technical, sales & adm. support	24.2	16.2	24.8	15.4
Services	18.1	19.2	26.4	27.2
Farming, forestry and fishing	3.7	5.8	7.7	15.2
Precision production, craft and repair	15.0	14.4	9.6	8.0
Operators, fabricators and laborers	23.0	30.5	12.9	17.7

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employment were "Service" and "Technical Sales Administrative Support" jobs.

Conclusions

The South Dakota American Indian population is in transition; socially, economically, demographically, and culturally. Though improvements have been made in educational attainment, high dropout rates from school still exist. Low median income and high unemployment and underemployment persist; many are employed in the lower paying sectors. High rates of poverty continue to be a critical problem.

Cut-backs in federal programs threaten to undermine the progress accomplished to date. The impact of reduced federal programs will have a lasting legacy for the American Indian people.

With improved educational and occupational opportunities, this generation of American Indians in South Dakota may, however, move through this "period of transition" and face a brighter future.

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